

CHAPTER 1

THE BASICS

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What Is Foster Care Licensing?

Within North Carolina's foster care system, licensing refers to the process of selecting and approving the families who will care for children. Unless otherwise specified by a court order, children in the custody and placement authority of a county DSS must be in foster homes licensed by the state or in court-approved placements.

1. The Licensing Process

The licensing process has three steps. These steps do not have to occur in any particular order. In fact, they often occur at the same time.

- A. Initial Screening/Application.** The components of this step are explained in detail in Chapter 3.
- B. Home Study.** During this step:
 - A residential study is completed with the family to determine if the dwelling meets standards. This process ensures children are placed in safe, suitable homes.
 - A family assessment is completed through a mutual selection process that determines whether the family possesses or can develop the characteristics and strengths needed to provide adequate care for a child.
- c. Decision.** The three key decisions made in the licensing process are as follows: (1) the family decides whether to foster, (2) the Supervising Agency decides whether to accept the family as a foster family, and (3) the Licensing Authority decides to approve or disapprove the Supervising Agency's application on behalf of the family.

The entire initial licensing process typically takes three to six months to complete, depending on the schedule and availability of training classes, the family's motivation, and the presence or absence of any hindrances to licensing.

Why We License Foster Homes

For the Children. Because they have been abused and neglected, children placed in foster care sometimes have needs and maladaptive behaviors that other children don't. In their review of the literature, Stukes-Chippingu and Bent-Goodley (2004) found the following about the well-being of children in foster care:

- Many exhibit emotional and/or behavioral problems
- Many are educationally at risk
- They are particularly at risk in the areas of social and life skills

We also know that children in foster care are more likely than children in the general population to have a lasting or recurring health problem.



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Children placed in foster care need and deserve temporary caretakers who understand their situation and who can meet their individual needs. Licensing is one way to ensure that foster families are up to the task of caring for these children.

For Birth Families. Although the parents of children in foster care have been temporarily deprived of custody, they have a right to expect that the care being provided to their children is at least equal to the care that they themselves would provide. Licensing ensures that foster parents have met certain minimum criteria in training and other areas.

For Foster Parents. The licensing process ensures that foster parents know about the risks and rewards involved in fostering, receive basic information needed to care for children in foster care, and make an informed choice about whether to foster. Licensing helps assure that foster families and the agency have a working partnership that is centered on building on the strengths and meeting the needs of children and families.

For the Child-Placing Agency. In North Carolina the ultimate legal and moral responsibility for ensuring the safety, well-being, and permanence of a child in foster care rests with the county DSS that has custody of that child. If the child is being cared for through a contract with a private agency, the private agency has legal and moral responsibilities as well. Licensing is a way to make sure that these parties are legally protected and working as a team to live up to their responsibilities to families and children.

The Legal Foundation of Licensing

The responsibility for the licensure of family foster homes and therapeutic foster homes in North Carolina currently lies with the Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section of the Division of Social Services, Department of Health and Human Services (see NC General Statute 131D-10, <<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us>>).



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North Carolina's licensure standards reflect the absolute minimum child-placing agencies must do to ensure basic protection of children in out-of-home care. It is the Division's hope that child-placing agencies will build upon this baseline to raise standards for foster homes and improve the care provided to children.

To provide family foster care or therapeutic foster care in North Carolina, the family in question must demonstrate compliance with minimum licensure standards. Once a license has been issued it must be maintained; licensing professionals must make sure foster parents have the support and information they need to maintain their licenses,

An Expanded Concept of Child Safety

Virtually everyone in the field of child welfare cares about children. However, traditionally our focus in foster care has been on the physical safety of children, with much less emphasis on their well-being.

Given the fact that some children spend years in foster care, this approach has been criticized as less than adequate. To address the situation, in 1997 Congress passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which calls upon child welfare agencies to pay attention not just to safety, but to ensuring the permanence and well-being of children as well. This increased emphasis on permanence and well-being is reflected in the reviews the federal government conducts in all 50 states, and in the child and family services reviews that the Division of Social Services conducts biennially with North Carolina's 100 county departments of social services (DSS agencies).

It is in this context that the Division strongly encourages the state's child-placing agencies to embrace an expanded concept of child safety. Instead of seeing safety as the absence of physical threats or risk factors, we should use our assessments and interventions with children in foster care to ensure we are providing everything they need to develop to their fullest potential.



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Because foster parents are their primary partners when it comes to nurturing these children and keeping them safe, agencies must do all they can to carefully screen, select, and continually support and assess foster parents. Child-placing agencies' most valuable "tool" for working with foster parents is the **quality of the relationship** between the agency and each foster family. Licensing professionals play a central role in this relationship.

All North Carolina foster parents are taught 12 essential parenting skills as part of their pre-service training. North Carolina strongly believes that when these skills are applied appropriately and consistently, the safety and well-being of children truly improves. Chapter 3 of this guide discusses ways licensing professionals can use the 12 skills to assess and support foster parents in an ongoing way.

Other useful tools for ensuring the quality of foster homes include MAPP/GPS, the foster parent pre-service, and other foster parent training. (MAPP/GPS, which stands for *Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting-Group Preparation and Selection*, is North Carolina's recommended pre-service training for foster and adoptive parents.) To learn more about foster parent training, see Chapter 10, "Training 101," and visit the Division of Social Services' training web site <www.ncswtrain.org>.

Who's Who in Licensing

In North Carolina we take a team approach to ensure the safety, permanence, and well-being for children in foster care. At a minimum, this team consists of the following members.

1. Licensing Authority

The Licensing Authority for family foster homes and therapeutic foster homes is the North Carolina Division of Social Services, Department of Health and Human Services. The Licensing Authority receives applications for foster care licenses and other licensing materials from public and private child-placing agencies (also referred to as "Supervising Agencies"). It reviews and approves or denies these applications and materials based on North Carolina's standards, policies, and procedures for licensing. The Licensing Authority communicates with Supervising Agencies if the licensing materials they submit require additional information, clarification, or materials so that the Licensing Authority can make a licensing decision.



The Licensing Authority does much more than fulfill an administrative function. Please see us as a resource, partners on the team serving children and families.

Yet the Licensing Authority does more than fulfill an administrative function. Please see us as a resource, part of the team serving children and families. Contact information for the Licensing Authority is as follows: NC Division of Social Services,

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Regulatory and Licensing Services, 952 Old U. S. 70 Highway, Black Mountain, NC 28711, 828/669-3388.

2. Supervising Agency

Supervising Agencies are public and private agencies responsible for recruiting, training, and supporting North Carolina's family foster care parents and therapeutic foster care parents. Supervising Agencies are an essential partner in the foster home licensing process; it is their role to submit to the Licensing Authority requests for initial licensure, relicensure, changes, terminations, and revocations. However, it is the role of the Licensing Authority to approve or deny these requests. It is also important to understand that Supervising Agencies do not have the authority to revoke licenses. Only the Licensing Authority can do that.

Supervising Agencies include all 100 county DSS's and the 87 private child-placing agencies licensed by the NC Division of Social Services. For a listing of public Supervising Agencies, go to <www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/local>. For a listing of private Supervising Agencies, go to <www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/licensing/listings.htm> and click on the link for "Foster Care."

3. Foster Parents

Foster parents, as part of the team of public and private agencies, play a critically important role in the child welfare system by providing the day-to-day care for children in foster care. Without their involvement, child welfare agencies would not be able to ensure the safety, permanence, and well-being of children and families.



Without foster parents, child welfare agencies could not effectively ensure the safety, permanence, and well-being of children in foster care.

There are two types of foster parents in North Carolina: those that provide **family foster care** and those that provide **therapeutic foster care** (sometimes called "treatment" foster care). Both types are licensed for a period of two years, after which they must renew their licenses to continue fostering. Both are knowledgeable, loving people who devote a portion of their lives to helping children and their families. As outlined below, the two types of foster parents also differ in many respects.

Advice from foster parents:

Treat foster parents as if you are glad they are on the team, not like they are "under" your control.

Be sure foster and adoptive parents can give their concerns and perspective when they are in child and family team meetings and for therapeutic decisions.

	Family Foster Care	Therapeutic Foster Care
License Duration	2 years	2 years
Maximum number of children in the home	5 Includes the number of family foster children (<i>capacity</i>), the foster parent's own children, relative children, licensed capacity for in-home day care, and children receiving baby sitting services.	4 Includes own children and relative children; no more than 2 (<i>capacity</i>) of the 4 children may be foster children. This can be two therapeutic foster children, one therapeutic foster child and one family foster child, or two family foster children.
Reason for Placement	Abuse, neglect, or dependency	Behavioral mental health; abuse, neglect, or dependency
Needs of Children	Vary	Usually more intense, complex needs than children in family foster care
Required Training	30 hours of pre-service 10 hours of training annually, with a total of 20 hours for relicensure Child-specific training outlined in out-of-home family services agreement Training in first-aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), universal precautions, and medication administration before a child is placed in the home.	40 hours of pre-service 10 hours of training annually, with a total of 20 hours for relicensure During the first year of licensure additional training in: the dynamics and needs of emotionally disturbed and substance-abusing youth and families, development of the person-centered plan, symptoms of substance abuse, and crisis intervention. This training may count towards 10 hours of in-service training. Child-specific training outlined in person-centered plan Training in first-aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), universal precautions, and medication administration before a child is placed in the home.
Compensation	Monthly payments according to NC's foster care board rate for room, board, and supervision	Monthly payments for room, board, supervision, and Medicaid payments for providing therapeutic services
Other	Cannot provide CAP/DA services in the home unless the disabled adult was placed in the foster home as a CAP C client prior to his or her 18th birthday. This CAP/DA client counts in the capacity.	Cannot provide in-home day care, baby sitting services, or CAP/DA services in the home unless the disabled adult was placed in the foster home as a CAP C client prior to his or her 18th birthday. This CAP/DA client counts in the capacity.

4. Birth Families

Because they interact with their children and with foster parents, birth parents and their families (grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.) also affect the world of licensing. Preparing foster parents to work with birth parents through shared parenting and educating foster parents about the issues with which birth families often struggle are key tasks for licensing professionals. If they perform these tasks effectively, foster parents are more likely to continue fostering, children will have more stable

placements, and there will be a better overall chance for improved outcomes for children and their families.

5. Children

Although their presence in foster care is caused by the actions of adults, children exert tremendous influence on the lives of foster parents and the social workers who license them. Children with challenging behaviors or intense needs can strain caregivers who are not adequately prepared. By carefully selecting, training, and matching foster parents and children, licensing workers help make sure everyone in the foster home is safe and well.

6. Rights and Responsibilities

To read about the rights and responsibilities of some of the parties described in this section, see item J, “Rights and Responsibilities,” in the Appendix.

Two Types of Licenses

Licenses are valid for the *number of children specified* and for the *period of time* and *place of residence*. The foster family receives an actual certificate of licensure from the Licensing Authority. There are two types of licenses:

- **Full.** Good for a maximum of two years, full licenses can be renewed.
- **Provisional.** Usually granted by the Licensing Authority only in special circumstances, provisional licenses are good for a maximum of six months while some below-standard component is being corrected. Provisional licenses cannot be renewed.